Comprehensive Study List of Historical Figures (1200–1750)

Islamic World and the Gunpowder Empires

- **Seljuk Turks:** A group of Central Asian nomadic people who founded a high medieval Turko-Persian Sunni Muslim empire in 1037. They conquered Persia and Anatolia, winning the **Battle of Manzikert (1071)** against the Byzantines, which served as a primary trigger for the First Crusade.
- **Mamluks:** Literally meaning "slave soldiers" of the Arab caliphates, these Turko-Iranian warriors invaded and divided Northern India, setting the stage for the rise of the Delhi Sultanate.
- **Nasir al-Din al-Tusi:** A Persian mathematician who made significant contributions to the "Golden Age" of Islamic academics by creating **trigonometry**.
- **A'ishah al-Ba'uniyyah:** A Sufi master and poet who was the most prolific female Arabic writer before the year 1900.
- **Mansa Musa:** The King of Mali who became famous for his high-profile pilgrimage to Mecca in the 14th century. He distributed such an incredible amount of gold along his journey that he spurred intense global interest in West African wealth.
- **Ibn Battuta (1304–1369):** A Moroccan Muslim scholar and explorer who traveled over 72,000 miles, mostly within the Islamic world. His work, *The Rihla*, chronicles the cities and wonders of the Muslim world but also displays a close-minded attitude toward foreign customs.
- **Suleiman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566):** The Ottoman Sultan under whom the empire reached its peak expansion, threatening Central Europe and Catholic lands while enforcing Sunni Islam.
- **Janissaries:** An elite military force of the Ottoman Empire composed of Christian boys taken through the **devshirme** system (blood tax) at age 8, forced to convert to Islam, and trained to be loyal only to the Sultan.

- **Valide Sultan:** The mother of the current Ottoman Sultan, who held the highest authority within the Imperial Harem and often exercised considerable political influence.
- **Akbar the Great:** The most successful Mughal ruler who consolidated power by 1555 through religious tolerance and the inclusion of local Hindu and Sikh leaders in the central government.
- **Zamindars:** Local ethnic princes and governors in the Mughal Empire responsible for collecting taxes and participating in the military in exchange for loyalty to the central government.
- **Timur:** A Turko-Mongol Persianate conqueror who established the capital of his 14th-century empire at **Samarkand**.

East Asian Dynasties (China and Japan)

- **Emperor Wuzong (r. 840–846):** A Tang Dynasty emperor who issued edicts that effectively annihilated Buddhism in China by destroying temples and relics to fund his military and "cleanse" China of foreign ideas.
- **Han Yu:** A prominent Tang figure who sought to reform Confucianism into **Neo-Confucianism** by removing spiritual elements influenced by Taoism and Buddhism.
- **Genghis Khan:** The leader who unified the nomadic tribes of the Mongol homeland in 1206 to create an unprecedented land empire. He was known for devastating military tactics like encirclement and the brutal destruction of cities that resisted him.
- **Ogedei:** The son of Genghis Khan who continued the expansion of the Mongol Empire after his father's death.
- **Kublai Khan (d. 1294):** The last leader of a semi-united Mongol Empire and founder of the **Yuan Dynasty** in China. He is also noted for his failed attempts to invade the Majapahit Empire in Indonesia.
- **Zheng He:** A Chinese court eunuch and Muslim admiral of the Ming Dynasty who led massive naval expeditions to the Indian Ocean (1405–1433) to broadcast Chinese power and establish trade.

- **Wu Cheng'en:** The author of *Journey to the West,* which was a global best-seller for centuries and helped popularize Chinese writing and literacy.
- **Emperor Kangxi:** A prominent Qing Dynasty ruler who maintained the Confucian Examination System to stabilize and control the Han Chinese population.
- **Tokugawa Ieyasu (implied):** The most powerful Shogun who unified all of Japan and established the **Tokugawa Shogunate** in Edo (modern-day Tokyo).
- **Samurai:** The warrior class of feudal Japan who transitioned from a military role to a more bureaucratic and administrative role during the 200 years of peace known as the **Edo Period**.

Europe: Thinkers, Rulers, and Explorers

- **Johannes Gutenberg:** The 15th-century inventor of the **printing press**, which allowed for the rapid and cheap dissemination of knowledge and religious texts.
- **William Shakespeare:** An English writer and playwright whose works (e.g., *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet*) helped develop the modern English language and captured the culture of the 16th and 17th centuries.
- **Miguel de Cervantes:** A Spanish writer who popularized the modern Spanish language through his literary works.
- **Nicolaus Copernicus:** A Scientific Revolution thinker who challenged the geocentric view of the universe with his **heliocentric** (sun-centered) solar system theory.
- **Galileo Galilei:** A scientist who used a telescope to confirm Copernicus's theories and proved that objects of different weights fall at the same speed.
- **Isaac Newton:** The scientist who proved that universal laws of motion and gravity control the movement of all objects.
- **René Descartes:** A breakthrough thinker of the Scientific Revolution mentioned as a key figure in the shift toward evidence-based knowledge.

- **Henry the Navigator:** A Portuguese prince who funded early 15th-century explorations to find a maritime route around Africa to the Indian Ocean.
- **Ferdinand and Isabella:** The Spanish monarchs who funded Christopher Columbus's voyages and utilized the **Spanish Inquisition** to expel non-Catholics.
- **Christopher Columbus:** An Italian sailor hired by Spain whose 1492 voyage to the "New World" initiated the global age of exploration.
- **Philip II:** The King of Spain who used the "Index of Prohibited Books" to ban Protestant and scientific literature and spent massive amounts of silver on European wars.
- **Louis XIV:** Known as the "Sun King" of France, he exemplified **European centralization** and the "Divine Right of Kings." He famously built the **Palace of Versailles** to control his nobles.
- **The Gentry:** A new class of non-noble, wealthy landowners and merchants in England and the Netherlands who commercialized agriculture and eventually obtained political power in the **House of Commons**.
- **Martin Luther:** A Catholic monk who wrote the **95 Theses** in 1517, sparking the **Protestant Reformation** by speaking out against Church corruption like indulgences.
- **Jan Hus:** An early religious reformer mentioned as a predecessor to the Protestant Reformation who was executed in 1415.
- **Marco Polo (1254–1324):** A Venetian Christian who traveled the Silk Roads to China and recorded his experiences in *The Travels of Marco Polo*, which captured the imaginations of European readers.
- **Margery Kempe:** An English mystic who wrote what is considered the first autobiography in English, chronicling her pilgrimages to holy sites in Europe and the Levant.

Russia and the Americas

- **Ivan III (Ivan the Great):** The Prince of Muscovy who defeated Novgorod, united the Rus people, and laid the foundation for a unified Russian state.

- **Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible):** The first Tsar of Russia who centralized power by crushing the **boyars** (nobles) through his secret police, the **Oprichniki**, and the **Oprichnina terror**. He was notorious for his violence, including killing his own son.
- **Peter the Great (1682–1725):** The Tsar who transformed Russia into a maritime empire by moving the capital to **St. Petersburg** and implementing Western-style reforms in the military and industry.
- **Metacom (King Philip):** A Wampanoag chief who led **Metacom's War** (1675–1678) against New England colonists, one of the deadliest conflicts in the history of American colonization.

Africa and Southeast Asia

- **Ana Nzinga:** A 17th-century queen of the Ndongo and Matamba Kingdoms (modern-day Angola) who resisted Portuguese influence for decades through diplomacy and military alliances with the Dutch.
- **Sunni Ali:** The leader of Gao who founded the **Songhai Dynasty** by conquering Malian cities like Timbuktu in the 1460s.
- **Askia the Great (r. 1493–1528):** A devout Muslim ruler of the Songhai Empire who opened schools like **Sankore University**, built mosques, and used Islam to consolidate the loyalty of his elites.
- **Osei Tutu:** The 17th-century founder of the **Asante Empire** who used the "Golden Stool" as a divine symbol to unify his people and built a highly disciplined army.
- **Afonso I:** A 16th-century King of the Kongo who converted to Catholicism and famously wrote letters protesting the illegal enslavement of his people by Portuguese traders.
- **Nyai Gede (The Great Lady of Gresik):** A powerful female merchant in Jakarta who owned and operated her own company and ships, illustrating the unique social power of women in Southeast Asia.